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Transitional Year Program--UMKC (University of Missouri-Kansas City)

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In an effort to aid freshmen whose academic backgrounds were weaker than those of other freshmen, the College of the Arts and Sciences, University of Missouri, Kansas City, inaugurated a program called "The Transitional Year." This program was planned to minimize the difficulties encountered by freshmen during the transition from high school to college study. Participants in this program are chosen from three groups: (1) Upward Bound graduates, (2) newly admitted freshmen, and (3) students who had become ineligible as freshmen the previous year. The program includes: (1) counseling, mainly academic; (2) tutorial work, (3) special English courses concentrating on writing, (4) developmental reading and/or mathematics courses, and (5) financial assistance. Evaluation of the program provided the following results: (1) 46 per cent of the group achieved a "C" average, and (2) 54 per cent achieved a grade average above probationary status (1.50). Problems noted were: (1) hostility, feelings of inadequacy, and general confusion among students, and, (2) little flexibility in the programs of the new students. Improvements planned included (1) expansion, (2) a pre-college summer program, and (3) an audio-tutorial center. (Author/KJ)

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TRANSITIONAL YEAR PROGRAM - UMKC

A. INTRODUCTION

In an effort to aid those entering freshmen whose academic backgrounds were weaker than that of other freshmen, the College of Arts and Sciences inaugurated a program called "The Transitional Year" in September, 1968. As its title suggests, this program was planned to minimize the difficulties encountered by freshmen during the transition from high school to college study. Presently, this effort is directed toward a special group of students described as "culturally or academically disadvantaged."

It is not unusual for a student to experience difficulty in the transition from high school to college study. The student's difficulty or problem may arise from a number of factors, but when the conditions of his personal and educational background include patent disadvantages, the problems are greatly magnified. In the past, it has been found that under these conditions regularly admissible students have experienced great difficulty in their freshmen year at UMKC, or more typically, have found the experience to be one of bitter frustration and failure.

It has been amply demonstrated that it is not enough merely to grant admission to college to disadvantaged and/or minority group students; nor is access through removal of financial barriers sufficient. The circumstances of background of these students may preclude any chance for success in college.

Focusing particularly upon the disadvantaged youth of the inner-city, the Transitional Year program is the first attempt on the part of the University of Missouri - Kansas City to meet the special educational and social needs of the inner-city student as he attends this institution.

The benefits of the program are two-fold: one, the student is helped to negotiate his course work successfully, to strengthen areas of weakness and to cope more adequately and realistically with problems of adjustment; and two, the University and the secondary schools of the inner-city gain knowledge and experience from the program in terms of improvement of instruction, counseling services, curricular planning, and development of special compensatory programs.

The Transitional Year program has its base of operation in the Academic Advising Office of the College of Arts and Sciences. This office coordinates services which are made available to the participants in the program. A Transitional Year committee has been appointed by the Dean of the College which includes members of the College faculty, various officers of administration, and student representatives, including Transitional Year participants. This committee is "chaired" by the director of the program.

B. PARTICIPANTS

Participants for the program were chosen from three different groups: 1) Upward Bound graduates; 2) newly admitted freshmen; and 3) students who had become ineligible as Freshmen the previous year

at UMKC.

UPWARD BOUND - For those of you not aware of it, Upward Bound is an anti-poverty program funded by OEO. It is a pre-college program designed to motivate and prepare high school students from poverty backgrounds to aspire to and be successful in post-high school education. The University has conducted this program on its campus since the summer of 1966.

Thirty-five of these students graduated from high school in Spring, 1968. Twenty applied for admission to UMKC and were accepted into the freshman class for the Fall. Each student received financial aid averaging \$1800.00.

The commitment of the University toward this group of students was one of the primary reasons that the Transitional Year program was developed. It was felt that these students would need to have a program of continued academic assistance during their first year in college if they were to be successful.

Newly Admitted Freshmen - Non-Upward Bound

The second group of students were regularly admitted members of the University's freshman class. These students had not been associated with any special program sponsored by the university such as Upward Bound. In terms of the admissions policy at UMKC, these students fulfilled all criteria necessary for admission.

It was felt, however, that this group was also in need of the academic assistance available in the Transitional Year program. These students were all graduates of inner-city high schools, and had other common characteristics. They generally ranked high in their

graduating classes (above 50th percentile) but scored low (close to 25th percentile) on placement tests required by the University. In the past, students with these characteristics flunked out of the University with alarming regularity. Thus, the program was devised also to halt the high incidence of failure among graduates of ghetto schools that are admitted to the University.

Readmitted Students Who Become Ineligible in Spring 1967

These students had all experienced a year as freshmen at UMKC. They all were ineligible to continue for the second year because of poor scholarship.

They had characteristics similar to the non-Upward Bound group with regard to high school rank and test scores. They were also graduates of inner-city schools.

These students were recruited for the program for several reasons. First, it was felt that they would have been likely candidates for the Transitional Year program had the program been in effect their first year here and, possibly, would have fared better in their academic work if they had been participants in the program. It was decided, therefore, to give these students a second chance, under more optimum conditions, to demonstrate their ability to handle college work. Secondly, it was hoped that the University might learn something from these students' involvement in the program which might enhance its ability to provide meaningful academic assistance to all students that are re-admitted after having experienced scholastic failure at the University.

C. RECRUITMENT

Students were recruited during the summer prior to the start of the 1968-69 school year.

Those students from the Upward Bound program were oriented to the program by their Upward Bound staff counselor and prepared for the forthcoming invitation to participate in the program by the academic adviser who helped plan their program in "Freshman Prep," the University's pre-college, orientation program for prospective Freshmen.

The non-Upward Bound group was recruited in the following manner:

1) New Freshmen

These students first learned of the program during their participation in the summer Freshman Prep program. Prior to that time, I suspect they felt as confident, as the other newly admitted freshman, and were ready and anxious to succeed at college. They were then told by the academic adviser who counseled them that they had little chance for success without availing themselves of the academic help of the Transitional Year program. It is understandable that a variety of intense emotional responses resulted. These reactions ranged from those of shock and feelings of inferiority to anger and later hostility toward this institution for labeling them as "dumbheads." No matter how tactfully the adviser approached these students in explaining that their need for a program like this, and that

it did not reflect upon their native ability but pointed up deficiencies in their prior educational experiences, the overture was generally perceived quite negatively. These students apparently accepted the program in an atmosphere of fear and confusion.

It is hoped that the summer pre-college phase planned for the 1969-70 program will greatly reduce the negative reactions of these students to the efforts by the University to offer academic assistance. This phase will be discussed later in the report in more detail.

2) Readmitted Freshmen

As mentioned earlier, these students had been dropped from the University the previous year because of academic ineligibility. These students were encouraged to apply for re-admission and were readmitted subsequently upon the condition that they participate in the Transitional Year program. These students appeared to generally accept the identification with the program and were glad to have another chance at school.

D. PROGRAM

The Transitional Year program includes careful academic counseling, tutoring developmental courses in basic skills, and special classes in freshman English.

1. Counseling

Transitional Year students were assigned to two advisers in

the Academic Advising Office whose sole advising load consisted of these students. They were then, readily available most of the time to deal with problems, academic or otherwise, with which the Transitional Year students needed assistance.

Appointments were set up with the students for specific dates by the advisers initially, but later, appointments were left up to the requests by students.

2. Tutorial Program

● Approximately, thirty undergraduate and graduate students at UMKC were recruited for tutoring duties in the program. They came highly recommended by the departments in which they are majors. They were judged, not only to be competent in their major field, but also in their ability to relate to others. They also had a high degree of interest in the program.

Many of these students were initially referred by the Student Human Relations Commission which is a University student organization interested in matters of social concern on campus and in the inner-city.

The major fields represented by the tutors were English, History, and Art History. These students also assisted with other courses wherever they felt they were qualified. Fifty-five faculty members also volunteered to tutor or provide assistance in other ways.

The tutors worked rather closely with the instructors in English and History and received instruction from them with regard to the approaches to be used in tutoring. Tutors were

required to submit brief reports of their tutoring sessions, describe the tutoring method used, and provide other information which might be helpful to the counselors in assessing student progress.

3. Special English Class

The students were assigned to two sections of freshmen English taught by two instructors selected personally by the Director of Freshman English. These instructors were felt to be very competent in knowledge of their subject matter and willing to experiment with new teaching approaches which takes into account the academic and culutral experiences of the students.

These classes followed the model used in the University's Upward Bound program the previous summer. The emphasis of the course was upon writing. There was a general de-emphasis of attention to grammatical usage, with more attention being given to the development of organization of ideas and clarity of expression on written communication. Films and writings of contemporary authors was used extensively. Writings of black authors were included in the curriculum.

4. Developmental Courses

All students were enrolled in non-credit, developmental reading in addition to their regular academic load. Several of the students were placed in a similar non-credit course in developmental mathematics when they indicated pursuing majors which required math.

A special instructor from the nearby Junior College who also had taught in Upward Bound for three years, was hired to teach the course.

5. Financial Assistance.

Twenty-seven of the fifty students enrolled in the program are receiving financial aid from the University. The average amount of aid is \$1800.00. The majority of students receiving this kind of aid are former Upward Bound students.

Other aid provided is in the form of free tutorial service (\$2 per hour) and free developmental (remedial) courses.

E. EVALUATION

1. Grade Point Average

A preliminary evaluation of student performance based on grade reports for the Fall semester indicates that a substantial number of Transitional Year students handled their academic work satisfactorily (that is, "C" average or better). In addition, there is another group of students who, while they did not make a "C" average, were within the grade range which is considered "on academic warning" (G.P.A. between 1.50 - 2.00) rather than on academic probation (below 1.5).

Forty-six percent (46%) of the group achieved a "C" average in the Fall. Fifty-four (54%) achieved a grade average above probationary status.

These results become more significant when compared to the performance of a group of twenty-one students from three inner-city schools who were freshmen at the University last Fall. Only two of ten managed "C" or better grade point averages. There were forty-two students from these same schools in this year's Freshman class. Eighteen students, or 43%, received "C" or better grades. Of those eighteen students, eleven were in the Transitional Year program.

Of the ten students designated as the "delayed" group in the Transitional Year, five or fifty percent achieved "C" average.

2. Tutoring

Some of the most significant experiences that have occurred in the pilot program have resulted from the close, interpersonal, encounters between Transitional Year students and their fellow students who serve as tutors. The interaction between these two groups has done much to dispel the image of the University as a large impersonal institution having little recognition or regard for the students who are admitted who have been ill-prepared for college work by their high schools. The exchanges that have occurred among these students of varying cultural and educational backgrounds have allowed for mutually broadening experiences for all participants.

3. Problems

UMKC's brief experience in the program thus far has pointed up some inadequacies also. The difficulty has been experienced primarily by the non-Upward Bound group. On this basis, the assumption is made that these inadequacies are the result of the lack of a pre-college component which would thoroughly expose prospective participants to the goals and objectives of Transitional Year. Some of the problems this created have been:

- a. Hostility, feelings of inadequacy, and general confusion. These feelings were apparently caused by the hasty recruitment of new freshmen for the program shortly before the start of the Fall Semester. These students had already been admitted to UMKC and presumably felt prepared to compete on a level with others in the freshman class. These same students were then requested to participate in the Transitional Year program which probably communicated to them that their previous training was inadequate regardless of their performance at the inner-city schools from which they graduated. It is understandable that they reacted as strongly as they did;
- b. Little flexibility in programs in which new students were placed. It was discovered, once the semester began, that some of the students needed less academic help than expected and could have managed quite well

with more than the limited academic loads allowed for all new freshmen in the program. For the first year all students were provided with essentially the same programs. In the future, a more flexible attitude regarding programs will be adopted so that an individual's program may be more suited to his abilities and needs;

- c. General non-acceptance of developmental courses in reading and mathematics by the students in the program. Closer attention to ability groupings in reading classes may help remedy this problem.

Another factor, however, is the reluctance of many of the students to accept the fact that they have some rather serious deficiencies in the basic skills. In this respect, counseling in terms of a realistic appraisal of the need for a mastery of these skills is required. One important factor may have been the fact the courses were non-credit.

It is felt that a summer pre-college program will eliminate or greatly reduce these problems for the Transitional Year student who has not been a participant in Upward Bound.

F. PROPOSED PROGRAM FOR 1969-70

The program proposed for 1969-70 features: 1) Expansion of the number of participants to 100; 2) A pre-college, summer program; and

3) an audio-tutorial center.

1. Students

The college of Arts and Sciences plans to recruit one hundred (100) students from inner-city high schools for the program for 1969-70. The sources of recruitment will be varied. These include the Upward Bound program at UMKC and elsewhere, the Metropolitan Area Talent Search, and area inner-city schools. Current Transitional Year students will be asked to recommend it to their friends and also serve as recruiters.

2. Pre-College Experience

During the pre-college experience, students will have an opportunity to select two college level courses on a credit/non-credit basis. Efforts are currently under way to secure commitments from area businessmen and civic organizations to provide scholarship aid and part-time employment for participants in the program. It is anticipated that increased numbers of students recruited for the program will include a substantial number of students who will need full financial aid in order to attend college. Therefore, it will probably be necessary to provide scholarship aid and part-time jobs which will compensate them for summer earnings they might have given up to participate in the pre-college program and also enough aid to sustain them during the academic year.

3. Academic Year Program

In addition to providing tutorial assistance, develop-

mental courses, and special college courses, the University plans to develop an area for students to meet with their tutors and to use special instructional material that will be compiled and developed in consultation with various faculty members. This program will be patterned after comparable projects at Hayward State College, California, Missouri and Oklahoma Christian College. This learning area will be equipped with audio-taped materials and individual equipment. It is expected that this approach will be of immediate benefit to students in the Transitional Year, as they strengthen areas of weakness while progressing at their own pace. Furthermore, it is anticipated that this project will be a definite asset to our overall undergraduate teaching program.

SUMMARY

The Transitional Year at UMKC is at best, an imperfect experiment in the development of a meaningful program of assistance to academic or culturally deprived students. Failure of students in the program to achieve good grade point averages or meaningful educational experiences at the University might still measure, to a significant degree, the failure of the institution to develop effective programs. I imagine the most effective approach will be realized when the students themselves take a more active part in its design and operation, and therefore, have more commitment to its success.

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